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Bye-Bye Blackbird

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Bye-Bye Blackbird

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Thesis

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Even if at the time I still wasn't well aware of this, the story was within me all the way, growing with me and gaining its own beautiful personality at every shot.

I had the privilege to lead this group of artists on a journey in which I was trusted, nurtured and believed in--in every single phase.

Now, without further ado, it is my pleasure to present my M.F.A. thesis short narrative project: *Bye-Bye Blackbird*.

Abstract

Bye-Bye Blackbird

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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This report traces in detail all the phases of the short film *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, from its concept idea to its final completion. This report, along with the finished film, fulfills the Thesis requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree in the Department of Radio-TV-Film at the University of Texas at Austin.

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Chapter 1: The Crisis and the path within myself

This production blossoms at the end of an arduous journey within myself. I hope this report will describe, in the most detailed possible way, the steps of that journey. I am grateful for the chance to retrace the reasons and motivations that led me to conceive, believe in, and produce this short film, hardships and obstacles notwithstanding.

Last year I was asked to turn in a page with a description of what my thesis would be. At that time, I was experiencing a creative crisis. I had explored every corner of my mind to search for clues to start envisioning my most important project, the final thesis. That sense of disorientation was the prelude of a journey, one filled with crossroads and obstacles that would eventually bring me, in the editing room, to my most rewarding and surprising experience. That is, during my M.F.A. program, after I had written, directed and edited three narrative works, but only one documentary, I was convinced that my thesis film should have been a documentary.

In this section, I will briefly describe how this documentary never happened, but embodied the main topics that I eventually developed in my thesis narrative short film. The concept of memory and its possible argumentations through the film medium, has always interested me. For sure, ever since I started shooting with a camera, even before I knew that that would soon become my chosen path, I felt the need to explore the inner motivations behind the act of recording images from a personal point of view.

During my graduate studies, where I had honed my skills as a shooter, director and editor, I felt that something in the filmmaking process was rapidly changing before my

eyes. This transformation, instead of opening new perspectives and inspirations, would awaken in me the fear that something would inevitably get lost in the irreversible passage from the photochemical process to the horizontal legitimacy of digital technology. What once was impressed physically onto celluloid, now is electronically synthesized into a series of numeric data.

A compulsive transformation had fully invested our generation of emerging filmmakers: we witnessed in less than ten years a continuous evolution of formats, workflows and philosophies behind the act of filming.

Despite being born into the age of digital filmmaking, having under my belt only a series of faded still images made with the old chemical process, being at UT offered me the priceless and unprecedented experience of dealing with the photochemical moving image format. This format would reveal to me the importance of technical and psychological preparation necessary in approaching filmmaking from a celluloid perspective. For about a year, the debate of film versus digital and the implications of this transformation on the human collective memory and perception became the main focus of my research. And I felt obligated, moreover, to develop my personal position on this issue.

Initially, I endeavored to trace in my personal memory the reasons that led me to approach the medium in the first place. In my college years, back in Italy, I would use my (digital) camera in an attempt to preserve the reality of my personal sphere, one without a technical approach to the medium, if only to capture moments that would otherwise fade into history.

My idea was not to shape a story out of the chaotic collection of images and sounds, but rather to attempt to “own” my surroundings through the lenses of my camera, to control them and protect them from disappearing from my consciousness forever. It’s interesting how this desperate try to preserve the memory of relevant and irrelevant facts about me, was really the proof that I was subconsciously another victim of the tyranny of the digital image, one that at the time was becoming popular through the diffusion of digital recording devices.

The alluring but false promise that anyone can instantly become a filmmaker, and anyone can have access to an easy way to preserve memories and relevant facts by pressing a button, was the trap I fell into for many years before grad school.

During my undergraduate years in college in Italy, I had amassed an enormous quantity of Mini DV tapes, only titled with dates on hand-made stickers. I kept these tapes sealed in their cases wherever I moved, without ever reviewing them for many years. Since my thesis focused on memory and filmmaking, I thought it would be an interesting opportunity to start looking for clues in my own collection of digital images. Why not open what I thought was the treasure chest of my own life experiences? As I started reviewing the Mini DV Tapes, I soon felt overwhelmed by the memories that this footage evoked in my own mind.

I started unfolding in my consciousness all the reasons why I was so obsessed with filming everything around me. But seeing these raw images of me as a twenty-something reflecting in the mirrors of the world, awakened in me a vague sense of sadness. Soon this process became so difficult and painful that I realized I had to stop it. I

started exploring other pathways to analyze the ability of the film medium to preserve memories intact in time.

The topic of “immortality of art” as it appears in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, had started to ferment in my consciousness around that time. Alas, this narrative short has strong roots in my initial documentary research.

On a personal level, I acknowledged that somehow film saved my life. For me, film is the ultimate reason. It is film that has taking me places and shaped my most important relationships. But how is this medium changing and how can I fit into its transformation?

I answered this and other questions by noting a fact from the recent news. Kodak, for instance, filed for bankruptcy in 2012. Fuji, for that matter, announced the discontinuation of photochemical formats in 2013. Suddenly I felt I was in the center of a tornado and it was my personal responsibility to document these facts and to understand what caused them.

Throughout my years at UT and earlier, I had always daydreamed about the romantic opportunity of shooting a story on film. When I saw the headline, ‘End of the Big Yellow’, it resonated in my head like a broken record. For days, weeks, even months, I started to believe that I was in the right place at the right time. That is, I was in the USA at the same time the first leading company for photochemical film was collapsing.

Throughout my undergraduate years, my interest was focused on how film is the most complete art form, the seventh art, regardless if it was first recorded on celluloid film or on a tiny SD card. I have been always fascinated with the idea that the roots of cinema

are embedded in figurative art, painting, history, architecture, theatre, music composition, still photography, reportage, et cetera. And all these elements can sum up in a total work of art, (if we can still use this word) *film*.

My generation, armed with a multitude of small Low-Res digital devices and with the rise of the internet as a video diffusing platform, was unconsciously switching the paradigm and changing the financial rules of the game from within. On the one hand, we participated in the global democratization of the electronic moving image; on the other, we were contributing, through excessive use and diffusion, to its demise.

While I kept working on this direction for months, I began to feel tired and overwhelmed. This research, instead of making me feel better about my work and chosen path, was making me feel helpless and disarmed. The more I learned about the ongoing digital versus film debate, the more I felt isolated, inadequate, and incapable of preserving the gift of enthusiasm and joy that comes through the process of creativity.

After an interval of about six months—i.e., trying to fundraise and do research, I realized I was standing on a stumbling block. I felt, moreover, I was the only person able to possibly overcome it. Realizing I had to open my mind to other ideas, I started dreaming of a short narrative story that would touch on the issues. But in my mind, I wanted this narrative to be both joyful and productive.

I wanted to express the fears and insecurities typical of this contemporary time, but I also desired a fertile ground—one in which I could cultivate new ideas and turn them into a positive message for my audience.

After all, I was given an opportunity to say something, a rare moment to pass along to my audience a message. And how that message might be received—through a tiny LCD screen of an iPhone or through a giant screen of a theatre—was not that important. I had had enough of victimizing myself for something I couldn't heal; I craved a new perspective. And I was still secretly hoping that my Kodak research hadn't been in vain, that what I had learned during that time, would have a place in my new story. Only then, would I feel ready to begin a new exciting journey.

Today, I can proudly say that I succeeded at metabolizing and synthesizing those motivations into a short narrative film—one in which I was able to find a fresh perspective, one in which I felt deeply engaged in a liberating, creative, colorful, vibrant and active direction.

I wrote a simple tale about the immortality of art in the context of human mortality. In it I focused on the opportunity given to artists to crystalize their identity in time and memory.

I kept alive the idea of explicitly interrogating my own medium, but this time using all the narrative devices It felt appropriate to the tone of my story. With this new approach in mind, still completely in the dark about who the main characters were and what their relationship was, I started listing on the blank page all the tangible elements of a hypothetical story I could possibly have access to.

Chapter 2: Shaping Bye-Bye Blackbird

Right around the time when my intentions drastically changed about my thesis film, I had a friend who, to support her studies, was selling ice cream out of a custom truck. She sometimes drove it to meet us, usually offering ice cream and using that circumstance to take a recreational break from her work.

As an Italian, nostalgic for the tastes and the rituals of my culture, and inspired by the gracefulness of her visits, I thought that somehow in my new story there had to be ice cream, or even better, “gelato”. Gelato was a common trait of my most exciting childhood memory, a special reward that we received every time we behaved well, or a secret treat we entitled ourselves to, even when we didn’t necessarily deserve it. Sometimes as kids, a gelato had also worked as a reward or a trophy after a traumatic circumstance, where we were eventually allow a comforting treat. While writing my story, I particularly referred to that emotional circumstance, and how a simple object could potentially overturn a tragedy into a cheerful event.

I can recall many times when as a kid, I was brought to the gelato shop after a visit to the doctor or the dentist and magically, it seemed, all my whining and complaining soon vanished.

With that idea in mind, I came up with a story concept that was so clear and so vivid in my imagination that it almost seemed to write itself.

With the help of my friends and family, who heroically sat through all my Kodak Calvary, I came up with the character of the ice cream artist Joe, a pure spirit whose role was to light up someone's darkness with the simple gift of unconditional humanity, patience and perseverance. In my mind, he was a wise yet naive, ancient soul, who was tenderly unfazed by the compulsive pessimism of modernity, and was there for someone who needed encouragement. For his role, I only auditioned two people, knowing pretty much who I wanted already: Bob Olson.

Bob, in his youth, for instance, worked with Federico Fellini in his film *Casanova*. To me, having a chance to work with a professional actor who once was in a set with the *Maestro*, was an unexpected and amazing opportunity. It would be a measure of what I had learned and also a discreet homage to one of the world's biggest cinematic influences.

Joe, the ice-cream artist, was in my mind like Bruno Ganz of *Wings of Desire* by Wim Wenders: Joe was an angel, a spirit or even a ghost, effortlessly giving hope to others, and holding his hand on your shoulder in your most crucial times. Having Joe at my side, I came up with another character, Tanesha, who was in a dark spot of her existence. The roots of her crisis were possibly involved in the creation of an art form and the complexity of the creative process.

My Kodak research about identity and memory through the photographic images came back as the ground to develop Tanesha's character. I initially envisioned her as a filmmaker, living in the shadows of a film set, where she was questioning her identity in relation to her actual role in life.

After a draft of the script where Tanesha's creative crisis corresponded with her inability to connect her identity and her role, I realized she had to be an actor, whose 'mask' was tragic in that it did not match her real 'self'.

The metaphor of the mask was incredibly effective in portraying the identity crisis of an artist, and could much better express it through an immediate visual archetype.

For her character, I mapped different creative avenues, and I gave myself the freedom to utilize symbolic abstractions, ones that would converging into her genesis as a real living person. Surely, I had plenty of resources within me, as I was personally going through the same process.

As I started re-reading the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello and his play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), I felt inspired by the idea that these characters were somehow trapped into their roles, and imprisoned between two dimensions, the perimeter of their performing 'stage' and the space of reality outside of it.

Their attempt to unveil the artistic mechanism and the magic of creation, corresponded in my mind to their emergence from a character to a person, and the intention to disintegrate a performing space into a real living place.

I invested my characters with the responsibility of being conscious of their 'fourth wall.' In this way, I could start an internal dialogue within them as people and as performers.

I started feeling the necessity for them to breathe off the page and to flee the perimeter of the paper and their set. This is the reason why this film came in two different

stages, a first phase that eventually became their shared “imaginary circumstance” and a second phase, shot one month later, that portrayed their living “reality”.

With the ten pages of dialogue I already had, I decided to start rehearsals. I was open to the fact that the depth of their relationship together, had yet to be discovered. I initially envisioned around these two characters a spatial vacuum, where the two of them met in a surreal yet plausible circumstance and their relationship had to be distant and forced. I wanted them to experience the alienation of being such opposites, and to build upon that feeling a possible compatibility in their improbable interactions.

As I was working to let their dialogue come to life, we started thinking of a subtext. What was their relationship like? What power dynamic was dominating their interaction in real life? The ten pages of dialogue we were rehearsing, did not indicate who they really were, but rather their ‘mask’ on a stage. What was the next level?

The actors liked the idea that they were invited to participate in the discovery of their real ‘selves’ behind their masks, and enjoyed the freedom of building into their masks their own imaginary pre-existent reality.

I think that at that stage, it was essential to allow both actors and myself the time and the space necessary for this truth to emerge. It was at times hard to recognize, but I had an incomplete creation up to that point and I was secretly trusting that the reality would emerge after we had done this first effort to incarnate the characters trapped on the written page.

After about three rehearsal sessions, the two had almost completely learned and memorized their parts. I was closely watching their natural relationship to each other and

I found that their personal features, as well as their different genres, races, ages, were visually lively and vibrant, in a very unexpected way.

I constantly interrogated them about what they felt during each beat, and took notes of their own words. I saved those notes as precious clues to develop the second part of their story on paper. Those notes contributed greatly to the meta-cinematic part of the script that was gradually coming to life during and after the pre-production and the production of the first part.

Chapter 3: The Pre-Production of a dream

While working with my actors, I started looking for possible locations to set their dialogue in. I was very sure it had to be a neutral zone, maybe in the middle of nowhere, or ideally in the desert. I was fascinated with the simplicity of the earth and sky bi-dimensionality, as I was looking for a simple ‘nothingness’ to set the first part of my story. The space would participate to my story as a real living character, contributing to their communication barrier.

It took me about a month to find out that in the diverse Texan landscape, the dunes around the beaches in the South of the state, were just a perfect set for the feel I was going for. I started my wanderings around these virtual landscapes using Google Earth, a great (digital) tool for affordable location scouting.

I remembered the “Eureka!” feeling, when exploring with my mouse the latest roads towards the southern coast of Texas and I decided to find out in person.

I organized a trip down to Port Aransas with a collaborator, and when we physically arrived there, I knew it was exactly what I was looking for.

The dunes, the strong winds, the bright blue sky with occasional white cumulous clouds and the big birds flying through it, was a perfect natural theatre for the strange encounter I wanted to stage.

Grateful to the landscapes I had found, on the way back to Austin we stopped by chance at a small town called Tivoli. Curious to discover the Texan twin of the Roman ancient colony, I also discovered another location for my story.

I was amazed to find out that Tivoli, Texas is actually a small rural village, with about thirty houses, one Mexican restaurant, one abandoned gas station and plenty of service roads in the middle of the rural plain; nothing more, nothing less. The desolate and primitive feel that both these location expressed, would have been perfect to set up the initial dialogue between my two characters.

The fact that this place brought back to my memory the atmospheres of films like *Paris Texas* by Wim Wenders, *Zabriskie Point* by Michelangelo Antonioni, *Morvern Callar* by Lynne Ramsay or *Baghdad Cafe'* by Percy Adlon, it was the sign that I was definitely marching on the right path.

Right outside of Tivoli, Texas, the landscape was so flat and vast that I started feeling dizzy, following the mirages on the infinite rural landscape and breathing the pure silence of that place, miles away from civilization.

I decided to break the ten pages dialogue in two parts, where the two characters would meet in the plain of Tivoli, and then travel together to the dunes of the coast.

I don't regret the decision to set their dialogue in two different locations, despite productively and financially it cost more to move and lodge my cast and crew. We decided to stay there the night, to be able to take pictures at sunrise the next morning.

After an indefinable arc of time driving through the country roads and the dark land, we came across a faded sign saying "Hopper's landing" and intrigued by it, we decided to

follow it. A few miles later, the road stopped, right by the beginning of the flat and static black water of the lagoon.

We landed on what looked like a fishing encampment, and an old lady came out one of the houses walking towards us with a flashlight. She was very friendly as she welcomed us to come in with a very thick south Texas accent.

We introduced ourselves and explained we were part of a movie crew and that we were looking for lodging for a group of fifteen people the next month. Her eyes lit up as she started showing us around. Eventually she was able to organize all twelve people in my crew in her "resort" for two nights.

As pre-production was in its full force, I started crewing up. With the premise of the trip to the South and the reservation of the brand new Arri Alexa from Equipment Checkout, I was surprised how this short script had already intrigued all these incredible talents from the pool of colleagues, friends and acquaintances in Austin. This project attracted not only great RTF undergraduate students, but also professionals active in Austin's film scene as David Conley, Billy MacCartney, Colemar Nichols, Ginny Mae Rowland and Lee Daniel, who since the beginning joined my research as a mentor and visual consultant.

I was lucky enough to count on this talented group of people behind the camera, in addition to having my two actors Bob Olson and Tanesha Conner already rehearsed and ready to jump in production.

Chapter 4: The production of the Dream

I will never forget the night we left for South-Texas. We were twelve people between cast and crew, organized to drive in three cars and one U-Haul truck with our equipment. To the equipment truck, we joined a small trailer with the ‘Cushman Joe’s’ ice cream truck on it. This vehicle, a 1970 three-wheeler dressed as a tiny ice-cream truck, took me, the Production Designer David Conley and his team, about a month to complete and put back on the road. It would soon become the mascot of our team. The resemblance of this vehicle to the fifties Italian *Ape*, immediately struck me as a perfect vehicle for the character of the *gelataio* Joe. So, supported by production designer David Conley and my other colleagues, we started researching possible visual references for the Cushman.

We found our main source of inspiration in Fellini's film *la Strada*. An itinerant circus performer, Zampanò, travels from northern to southern Italy on this old, noisy, rickety and scruffy tent mounted on a motorcycle. That image was our visual reference to develop the ultimate Gelato Cushman, adding to Zampanò's Ape, stripes of vibrant colors inspired by the American Fifties and Sixties.

The same night we left Austin, the Cushman underwent its last touch ups. In the meantime, while the Art department was completing its tasks and the grips finalizing their gear check-list, I looked at all of them. These were my friends and collaborators, and I couldn't help hide a deep sense of gratitude, of dedication towards all of them. As Tanesha had put it recently, we thought we were suddenly part of a strange dream, a three day and three night affair. Then we headed to the big South.

After about five hours driving in a straight line interrupted only by the end of solid ground, we finally reached Hopper's Landing. Indeed, we noticed, right away, that the old lady had prepared our lodging. The next day, before sunrise, we all gathered in the central courtyard. We then drove to set via a service road about a mile away from there. The sun was timidly diffusing its iridescent orange and pink light over the still blue water, and right about then we realized that, our journey had begun.

The first day of production ran very smoothly. We were able to cover all our proposed shots, except one: we couldn't get the shot of the Cushman travelling in the distance. It was due to a mysterious incapacity between the 400mm telephoto lens and the limited tolerances of the P.L. hard-mount on the Alexa.

Because I had the bulk of the dialogue and all my reactions for that day covered, I decided to wrap about a half-hour before sunset, communicating that the shot of the moving vehicle was our absolute priority the next day at sunrise.

As fate would have it, the next morning the Cushman engine failed. This was only our second day of shooting. No one on set was able to make sense of the Cushman's demise. It appeared, for all intents and purposes, inexplicable. Not only did the Cushman breakdown leave me embittered, it temporarily dismantled my self-confidence.

It also forced me to limit the traveling shots to the minimum, and jump directly into the coverage of the second part of the dialogue on the beach location, thus dashing my hopes of creating a homage sequence to the venerable classic Fellini road movie "La Strada".

I made sure we had all the remaining dialogue of the first location in the can, but still I had to cross out about a half page—i.e., describing through traveling sequences the character's journey from the rural land to the beach.

We were only able to achieve two traveling shots in total, with me and my crew disposed in the back of the vehicle, unfailingly pushing it uphill on the dunes at every take.

I thought that nothing could top the Cushman engine failure, of course, until I received a phone call at lunchtime on our last day of the South Texas shooting.

The call, it turns out, came from the mother of my kid actor. She was the woman we had expected to arrive in the next hour in order to participate in our most conclusive and crucial shot of the film. She was calling to let me know that they would not be able to make it on set that day.

Suddenly, as in the Cushman fiasco, I felt that there were some kind of cosmic and inexplicable forces working against me, Forces so strong and overwhelming, that they would keep this film from ever seeing the light of day.

Visibly shaken, I abandoned myself on a dune, letting my tears come out freely for a few minutes. At that moment I realized we had all endured so much—much, much, more than we had bargained for. But, setbacks aside, I believed we had come to this point for a reason—one that wasn't about to let two bad events such as the loss of a picture vehicle and a principal actor stop the dream, the dream of this film, from unfolding in front of my very eyes.

What on a regular Hollywood production would mean bond company intervention and an immediate forced wrap, I realized at that moment, that with an enthusiastic, independent film crew, these problems would have to turn to our advantage in a timely manner. It was my responsibility.

I knew there had to be a possible solution. Still rather bewildered, I began brainstorming alternative endings, but the two problems of the Cushman and the absence of my kid actor seemed at first insurmountable. I looked around: the curved lines of the dunes, the sun quickly descending towards the blue horizon, the infinite ocean, birds flying, my crew laying on the sand next to the Cushman, bustling about its irreversibly and inexplicably broken engine.

I saw the light.... the crew! The crew was all I had at that moment.

I gathered all the resources I had left and I decided to involve everyone in my last shot: tracking Tanesha singing her song on the beach. For this shot, the camera would turn around to reveal my heroic friends and collaborators.

They seemed to be excited about the idea of being part of the film. They sat down, setting aside their grief for the dead engine and then gathered around me to build the next shot. We set up a wide shot on the beach, framing the actress walking towards the ocean and the work zone of the crew. It was a perfectly organic re-assessment, as daylight was quickly becoming scarce.

Once the dolly tracks were disposed in position, we looked through the camera and, unbelievably, the U-Haul truck was occupying one side of the frame. I asked one of my

grips to move it away from the shot, but the truck - instead of leaving the frame, dramatically sunk deeper in the sand. That, however, was too much for me to bear.

While the sun was quickly going down, the crew stood up to encourage me and in less than ten minutes we re-positioned the tracks, the actor's position and the frame.

We successfully improvised that shot, following the main character walking on the seashore. We designed the shot to pan 180 degrees, revealing the crew.

After one take, the sun finally disappeared behind the dunes: we all clapped our hands energetically to celebrate one successful day on an independent set.

I felt relieved and satisfied, and immediately thought of the most powerful self-reflexive endings in films, like Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool*, or Federico Fellini's *8 1/2*.

That shot remains probably my favorite shot in the film, because it summarizes the value of a great collaboration in the creative endeavor. That night, when we drove back to Austin with a series of incredibly poetic shots in the can, I found the definitive meta-cinematographic subtext for the story to come.

Chapter 5: Post-Production of the Dream, Production of the Truth

Between Christmas 2012 and New Year 2013, I dedicated my time editing the first section of my story and rewriting the second part. That month's work has been crucial for the development of this story as it is today. During that month, I focused on the meta-cinematographic topic, and tried different drafts of the second story within the story, developing further the relationship between my two characters.

Tanesha, my main character, was now incarnating the 'crisis' in the filmmaking process, but from an actor's standpoint. Initially her monologue in front of the mirror in the script was "To Be or Not to Be" in Shakespeare's Hamlet, but that idea never really completely convinced me.

I asked Tanesha to read Shakespeare's Hamlet and to memorize the soliloquy. The necessity of a monologue, served the story to express her double identity of mask and face, evoking symbols and images, but the archaic language and the self evident truth of Hamlet's soliloquy, just didn't feel cohesive with her character. It was a stretch for me to imagine a non-actor, suddenly mastering one of the most challenging monologues ever written, so I came up with a different idea.

I decided to begin writing her monologue, inspired by fragments from my own notes on Hamlet, and all the other themes I included in the film. Patience, perseverance, immortality, the relationship between art and reality, the one between a role and a living person, were some of the few cardinal themes in the script.

In the exterior sequences already shot, I had her introducing the theme of the mask, while, when she was asked to tell a story, she covered her face with another face, the one of a fierce wild beast, traditionally associated with the role of the villain in folk literature.

The idea that the villain in her personal story could somehow be herself, is expressed in the mirror's sequence, where she directly interrogates her consciousness, reflecting about her condition of captivity in a defined role.

In the previous version of the script, she was struggling to get a role in an audition setting, but I felt that it wasn't fitting with my meta-film interpretation up to that point. In the current version of the script, I transformed her audition scene to that of a film set.

I revisited a few films dealing with filmmaking and the dynamics on set, like *The State of Things* by Wim Wenders, *Day for Night* by François Truffaut and *Living in Oblivion* by Tom DiCillo and I found many sources of inspiration and creative approaches.

I had a vast pool of direct collaborators to involve in this part of the shoot, additionally to the great resource of accessing a professional sound stage at RTF facilities at UT. The only thing I was missing, at this point, was a director for this picture where Tanesha was the main character.

Initially, I thought I could be in the film, interpreting myself dealing with my actor, but then I immediately realized that the role of the director had to be for Bob Olson, who previously interpreted Joe as the Ice Cream artist. Not only would his range allow me to switch tomes and intensity, but from the sweet and human character of the

confectioner, he could perfectly become the vitriolic and cynical director of a picture that couldn't be made, because the lead actress "just didn't feel it".

It was possible at that point, to trace clear analogies between the ingredients for the perfect ice-cream and the essential elements of filmmaking. His role as an ice cream confectioner, searching for the perfect taste and texture, corresponded perfectly with the director's vision for a perfect work of art. But when an ice cream is only a temporary pleasure, a film has the potential of remaining in someone's consciousness in perpetuity.

I called him and told him my idea: he immediately agreed to do it, reinforcing that his character eventually needed to come back in the story under a different appearance.

The following rehearsals were focused on finding the opposite tones that we used for the confectioner persona. My goal was to identify sharp moments, piercing conflict and comedic performances between a punctilious director and a reluctant actor, and the scene on the set came together pretty quickly and effectively.

If Bob struggled a bit with the sweetness and innocence of the role of Joe as the ice cream artist, the role of the director came to him organically and flawlessly.

To achieve the sense of a real working set, I involved all my friends and colleagues already involved on my film, to create a believable choreography.

That part of the shoot felt extremely smooth, compared to the first section in South Texas: I was surrounded by colleagues and friends, we had the RTF's resources handy, but most importantly, we were far away from the challenges on the desolate dunes and the rural fields. For this second shoot, I had the pleasure to welcome on board two assistant directors, who were crucial to keep a fluidity to our workflow.

The "stage/set" sequence, which was scheduled for two days, was completed ahead of schedule of about six hours, so at lunch time of the second day, I had an extra afternoon to solidify the planning of the third and last day of the shoot, the kid's scene.

For The Ice cream man's memory, I had envisioned a small child, lost in a vast white vacuum, a space in which the confines of reality faded into the ancient childhood remembrances. With my Production Designer David Conley, we researched and finally found a Cyclorama, a seamless white wall used in photography to neutralize any spatial dimensionality. In this indefinable place, we organized a scene for the kid, decorated only with a few significant objects.

The scene was set in the fifties, when Joe as a kid fell in love with the french-american showgirl Josephine Baker.

We had met with Kevin, the young actor who interpreted Joe as a young man, several times to memorize the song by Josephine Baker *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and to expand his physical life into the scene.

I felt extremely lucky that he added a lot of great qualities to his character, including his talent for singing and dancing and his incredibly sharp humor.

The next day went really fast, as my crew was immediately able to engage on a very informal and comfortable dialogue with the kid: we were able to get a great number of comedic reactions and performances by our young entertainer.

For the kid's section, I planned to produce an engaging montage of dances, singing, reactions, and even a puppet show with the song: by wrap time I felt I had all the elements I needed to cut together the thirty second clip I wanted.

The following day, after we completed returning the equipment, I was so curious and anxious to see my dailies from the last three days on set, that I got back in the editing bay and started logging my second portion of the film.

Chapter 6: Post-Production

My experience with the editing process of this short-film has been most exciting and rewarding, despite some typical challenges in some of the actor's performances.

My two actors came from two very different places: on one hand Bob came from an academic stage training, on the other hand Tanesha had never acted before.

The lead actress of this film only had a few experiences as a model, where she was taught to walk straight, to profusely blink and to pose for the camera.

After our many rehearsals and readings, I gradually managed to re-orient her camera looks elsewhere and explicitly asked her to try to limit her blinking to the minimum. That direct dialogue with her was productive in most cases, as she showed to be very adaptable and willing to excel in her work as an actor.

In some other moments however, especially when she was tired, she still fell back into her modeling training and tended to feel at times staged in her performances. In the editing phase I focused on resolving the limitations of working with a non-actor, and that was at times difficult. I believe I succeeded at saving their best moments, and with a very limited amount of ADR, to fix some of the most stumbling lines.

In the editing phase of the first section, my priority was to make their performances cohesive and their dialogue fluid. In rehearsal we identified the strongest moments in which they were actually feeding off each other, so on set I aimed to encourage strong eye-lines, body language, and energetic reactions towards each other.

Because I couldn't hire a script supervisor to join us in the trip to the South, there were a few inconsistencies, especially in Bob's performance: he changed his jacket and hat in different moments of the script, and he had trouble remembering in which line he'd perform one task or the other. I was well aware of this problem on set, so I made sure to get some clean shots of him simply changing his outfit or switching position, with no lines of dialogue to disturb his physical action: in the editing room, those silent moments came back as crucial beats, in which their forced interaction became stronger and even more evident.

Right after the completion of the first part of the film, I initially had questioned if I should be the editor of this film or I should hire someone else, but because I personally started the process of synching and logging my own material, I felt that I was the only person who knew the footage well enough to navigate freely through it, without the risk of losing important beats I knew I obtained in production.

Another good reason to be my own editor was that I already crafted the rough-cut of the first section by the end of the Fall Semester 2012, and that was extremely helpful to begin the editing process of the film as a whole in February 2013.

The first and the second sections of the story, because of their conflicting nature, were treated with two very different approaches in the editing phase: while the first series of shots came separated from their sound, the second sequences were already previously synched. This simple fact made a great difference in the process of getting the footage ready to go in the timeline.

After spending an incredible amount of time synching the first part of the film during the Christmas break, I made sure that for the second part of the shoot in Austin in January 2013, my sound recordist had learned how to synch sound directly in the Alexa. That decision saved me a lot of time, allowing me more opportunities in the editing phase.

While editing the first exterior sequence of the story, knowing it would have to cut together with the next sequences to come the next month, I added tentative markers on my timeline indicating when the dream would fade into the reality and vice-versa. This helped me visualizing the exact sequences I needed, to fulfill the visual elements of the previous shots and take the narrative forward in the most effective way possible.

When the second series of sequences had arrived from the Alexa's cards, I already knew where each beat was located on the timeline, so I started working with the two separate sequences, aiming to find visual transitions between the two phases. I found that process extremely inspiring, as I found more creative solutions while closely observing my shots and working them around.

The second part of the shoot went so smoothly in production that it took me only about a week to put together in post-production. By that point, the crew had also already gained an excellent level of collaboration on set, after the challenging South Texas adventure.

As a result, this second part was extremely smooth to work with in post-production, as the camera movements and lighting effects obtained in the studio setting, allowed me to a lot more open and creative approach in the editing phase.

I initially distinguished the two sequences by keeping the outdoor sequence in its vibrant colors, and turning the interiors in black and white: that decision remained in the final film, as I found that it could best express the transitions from a dimension to another and help the audience identify with the character's worlds as well.

From the beginning of the writing of this short film, I was sure I already had most of my soundtrack, the song *Bye-Bye Blackbird* interpreted by Josephine Baker. The song comes up in three different meaningful moments in the narrative: at the beginning, when Joe sings it after he first meets Tanesha, in the central section of the film, when Joe as a young man remembers his love for Josephine Baker, and at the end, when Tanesha singing it on the beach, had overcome her crisis.

Since my first draft, the song was a keystone in the balance of the elements in the narrative, and served as a device to connect the film from its title, to its development, until its conclusion.

Now, all I had to do was finding Tanesha's musical theme.

After I had researched and recorded a few different artists in town, and kept looking for the perfect score to describe her crisis, I came across this band from Austin, *Balmorhea*, and tried one of their songs, *Candor*, on the transition between the interior in her bedroom and the exterior sequence in the rural plain. I had read that their musical research went towards a visual approach to the landscape, and I perceived that vast, honest and open quality about their sound.

I am not sure if it is because they come from the places where this story was conceived and portrayed, but the song worked perfectly on the short initial sequence,

establishing the tone for the beginning of Tanesha's wanderings and her intimate monologue within herself.

As a counterpoint, I had the old-fashion rhythmic and lively sound of *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, written in 1927 and interpreted by Josephine Baker, to define Joe's world, from his childhood to his present, into Tanesha's creative imagination.

The use of soundtrack aided the process of organizing the visual material, and at times it almost felt like the music was the source of the images. Since the beginning the soundtrack resolved the challenge of distinguishing two intertwining stories and represented a clear and meaningful device to identify each narrative sequence.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

When I entered the program in August 2009, my priority was to learn and experience the life of a film from its conception to its realization on screen, allowing the creative process to unfold naturally and organically.

I believed that a film, as the most complex and complete work of art, has the unique ability to earn an independent personality, feeding from the talents and the factors that contributed to its creation.

Never like in this film, had I the privilege to directly observe and facilitate the freedom of the life of a story, and support its right to come to the light and engage a truly stimulating dialogue with its audience.

I will be forever thankful for having had the opportunity to identify my strengths as a director, and to trust my ability to have become a special storyteller, with the highest respect and consideration for the personality of my creation.

This experience will remain in my heart the most exemplary demonstration that making a dream come true is not only possible, but truly the most liberating and rewarding experience in life.

Appendix 1: Original Script

Bye-Bye Blackbird

by Gaia Bonsignore

EXT. ABANDONED SERVICE STATION, DESERT - Early Morning

Abandoned service station on a highway, on the plane (only sparse vegetation). No one is around, just the plane and the sky with birds flying through it.

We see the Cupcake truck arriving.

We can hear the music from the truck's speakers: Josephine Baker. Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1927.

JOE, dressed in a vintage cupcake chef uniform, around 50 years old, comes out of the truck. He seems quite happy and satisfied. He opens the window of the truck, we can read on a handmade sign JOE'S DREAM CUPCAKE.

He places his signs with the cupcake's truck name, adjusts the signs with the prices. He polishes the counter carefully, the colors are pastel, reminiscent of the fifties. He places an advertising sign right in front of the window of the truck and polishes it. He performs all these actions like dance steps. His grace and agility are unpredictable for a man of his age and size. Smiling he sits down and waits. Fade out.

Hours later, Josephine Baker music still playing, we see a car at the horizon. Joe looks and quickly composes himself. The car rushes in the courtyard of the abandoned gas station.

A beautiful black girl, tall and stunning, TANESHA (23) comes out of the car quickly. She looks upset, unsettled, maybe she was crying a minute earlier.

Whoever is driving, we can't see, but someone throws her suitcase out of the car door, closes it violently and leaves with a squeal. Joe, who was smiling a second earlier, turns worried and serious at this scene.

The girl sits on her suitcase, dries up her tears and blows her nose.

Joe is saddened.

The place is totally empty - there are only these two figures, far away from each other, distant. Joe's music still playing.

Attempting a move to comfort her, Joe from far away kindly asks:

JOE

Good morning young lady, would you
like a delicious hand made vanilla
dream hazelnut sprinkled cupcake?

The girl doesn't answer. She seems lost in her thoughts.

JOE

Excuse me young Lady, would you
like to try a delicious hand made
vanilla dream hazelnut sprinkled
cupcake today?

TANESHA

(Looks at him for the first time)
...Are you talking to me?

JOE

It's free, it's on the house!

Tanesha looks at him as if he's from Mars. Tanesha looks at him, suspiciously:

TAN

No, Thank you.

JOE

It's very very good, you know. It's the best Cupcake you
could ever find in the southwest. How lucky you are!

TAN

Thank you, but...

JOE

You know what people say about my cupcakes? That when you try one once, you can't do without! See the sign?

He shows her his rudimentary advertising sign: "My dream is Joe's cupcakes!". Then he picks one cupcake:

JOE

Here you go, try it!

TANESHA

Listen, you are kind, but I can't deal with this right now.

He looks at her seriously and remains silent for a beat. Then he starts carefully polishing the truck and the counter again.

JOE

...Because if you want to make a great tasting cupcake, first you have to select the ingredients very carefully. Good fresh milk, good eggs, and a lot of patience to work the cream into the right consistency...

The girl starts showing some signs of distress...

JOE

Where are you heading today young Lady?

TANESHA

Listen, I'd like to be left alone.

JOE

Oh! Don't be so serious! A good confectioner is always at his client's service!

TANESHA (looking away)

Ok, now I'm your client.

She takes a beat and then looks at him with an interrogative look.

TANESHA

And why are you expecting to find clients in the middle of

the desert? There's nothing here.

JOE

Well, it's all about waiting. Patience is important.
(pause) If you do everything with the best intention,
sooner or later, people will come. Appreciation comes. And
you should know by now that my cupcakes are great! (pause)
This is the first rule of a proper confectioner, always
make your cupcakes taste great, my father always told
me.... You know, my father was from Palermo, in Sicily, he
was a confectioner there...My family was confectioner for
many many years, they had a small shop...

TAN

Please, stop. Please!

Wind starts blowing. The girl sits on the suitcase, she is
stressed. In the sky we see birds crossing.

JOE

I don't mean to disturb you. But I want you to know that
here, it's hard. If you were looking for a ride here...

TAN

Don't you get tired of this?

JOE

Not tired, but you see, here no one passes. No cars. No
one.

TAN

Listen, a while ago you told me that for you it doesn't
make any difference, it's just about waiting. Well, here I
am, waiting too. (pause) Please, now leave me alone.

Right at that moment, a car hurtles without stopping in the
nearby highway.

JOE

See? There goes a car now.

TAN

I'm not blind!

JOE
But it didn't stop.

TAN
There goes a client now.

JOE
And I can guarantee you that if they did stop, they surely
would have had a cupcake.

TAN
Anyhow, it didn't stop.

JOE
Well, it's true, It didn't stop. You're right.

More silence. The sky turns cloudy. The girl, like the sky,
falls back into her darkness. She is about to cry.
He is restless, looks at her, comes in and out of the truck
a few times, he looks at her worried, resist the temptation
to cheer her up, he doesn't know whether or not to console
her.

JOE
(can't take it anymore)
Please, don't be sad. What is it? You need to talk, young
lady. Get it all out. See? I am here. I'm not going
anywhere. I'm a good listener. Just get it all out.

The girl is now crying. Without making eye-contact with
him, she covers her eyes with her hand. Tears.

JOE
I'm gonna stop talking. See? I'm
gonna sit here, silent. I'm not
gonna say a word. But please, talk.
Talk to me. Say whatever you like.
Anything. What is bothering you? I
am here, just listening. Please...

For the first time Tanesha looks at him, nods, stops
crying, and almost raises a smile to him. Eye contact, wipe
her tears.

She starts laughing now, the insistence of Joe is becoming comedic, she can't hide laughing.

TAN

Why should I tell you my business?

JOE

Well, then tell me someone else's business. Someone else's story. You can make it up. Whatever you want. I will sit here listening to you, in silence.

TAN

(Laughing and crying at the same time)

You are curious, you know that?

You are crazy. All alone, in this place forgotten by God, selling your cupcakes to no one. To ghosts! And you think you can help me. You're no confectioner. You're crazy, that's what you are. The craziest crazy man I've ever met.

For the first time she leaves her suitcase-chair behind. She gets closer to the truck. With an intense and seductive look, she gets close to his nose and staring into his eyes:

TAN

I will tell you the story of a troubled prince, tortured by his doubts...

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INTERIOR, STAGE OF A THEATRE, NIGHT.

We can see the first rows of a nearly empty theatre. The spotlight on the stage reveals a tall and skinny figure in silhouette coming from behind the scene. A bored director with some assistants are sitting in the first rows, auditioning actors. They are scribbling on papers. As she enters stage, the director coughs, examining her, and is following her with his eyes.

STAGE DIRECTOR

Tanesha...? Is there anything you want to start with?

TAN

I'd like to do William Shakespeare's Hamlet soliloquy.

For a moment, the director and the assistants look at each other, giggling something inaudible, then the director stops and looks at her still with a sort of sarcastic smile on his face.

DIRECTOR

Well. Very well. A male character. Interesting.
Whenever you are ready.

There is a silent beat. Tanesha breathes deep. She starts the monologue initially quietly. Then her interpretation gets more and more aggressive, almost like an aggression against an imaginary audience.

TAN

To be, or not to be--that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing, end them.
To die, to sleep--
No more--and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep--

Her interpretation turns the doubts of Hamlet into an intense self reflection about her personal and angry NOT TO BE. We can see the close up of her eyes, then her tears.
She starts crying while on stage.

To sleep--perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.

DIRECTOR

(interrupting her)

Well... interesting. We will let you know. Thank you.
Next?

FADE OUT
FADE IN:

EXT. ABANDONED SERVICE STATION - DAY

Close up of Joe's eyes, he is ecstatic and his eyes are shining.

JOE
This story is beautiful... I...

TAN
Not everybody liked it.

JOE
How... How can you be so good at telling a story!

TAN
In a way, that's my job.

JOE
Your job?

TAN
My job. I AM the story. Someone else is directing.

JOE
You mean, you're an actress?

TAN
(Looking towards the sky)
At the moment I am someone who doesn't have a story to be,
broken up, alone on a highway, in the middle of the desert,
stuck.

(Pause. Looks at Joe)
Talking with some weirdo from Palermo who believes he is a
confectioner named Joe.

JOE
Listen, you are incredible. I got goosebumps over here!
(showing her his arm)
See? I got goosebumps.

TAN
(smiling)

Stop! You said you were gonna shut up.

He looks at her, ravished, smiling. She walks around him a couple of times curiously.

TAN
Give me a cupcake. Now!

JOE
Of course, Mademoiselle.

He walks into the truck, singing nonsense joyfully. Then he appears with a cupcake. She takes a bite.

TAN
I've told you my story. Now it's your turn.

JOE
I am not as good as you...

TAN
You were the one who came up with this story of the stories!

JOE
OK, OK! I'll try...

JOE
When I was a kid I wanted to dance with the stars...

FADE OUT:

INTERIOR OLD CINEMA THEATRE, FIRST ROW - NIGHT

We see a eight or nine year old boy, looking just like a young Joe, sitting on the first row. He's having a cupcake. Everything around him suggests we're in another era, maybe even the fifties. The screen lights his smiley face. Archive images on the screen of Josephine Baker singing and dancing Bye Bye Blackbird. We see the boy's feet, moving in rhythm. Pan up to ecstatic face. We see Josephine Baker dancing, but then she turns into Tanesha, dressed just like Josephine, super happy. She

exits the black and white screen, and reaches the first row of the cinema theatre, dancing right in front of young Joe. The boy stands up, and starts dancing in front of the beautiful black star. She picks up his hand, twirls the boy. In the twirl the boy turns into the present Joe, the old Joe, twirling back to reality. Joe stops, slowly opens his eyes. He realizes he's holding Tanesha's hand. She's smiling. He takes his hand back, incredulous.

TAN
(looking radiant)
Wow. Wonderful story...

JOE
(turns smiley)
It's a story that tastes like Cupcakes! How does it taste?

TAN
Sweet, Joe. Sweet.

JOE
Exactly... Quality is important and so is patience.
(pause, he looks around)
Patience...

Tanesha looks around with a sense of liberation. She looks at the suitcase:

TAN
Joe, I gotta go now. Lovely to meet you.

JOE
Next time, then.

TAN
Thank you.

JOE
Thank you young woman.

He gets up, eyes her for the last time, then he goes in the truck. She picks the suitcase and leaves, and while walking along the highway, she turns around to look at joe's truck, but the truck is gone, faded out, with all the signs and

Joe in it. Smiling Tanesha turns back around, walking along the long highway in front of her.

Fine

Appendix 2: Production Script

Bye-Bye Blackbird

EXT. RURAL FIELD - Early Morning

Abandoned house on the plain (only sparse vegetation). No one is around, just the plane and the sky with birds flying through it.

A car rushes in the country road.

A beautiful black girl, tall and stunning, TANESHA (23) comes out of the car quickly. She looks upset, unsettled, maybe she was crying a minute earlier.

Whoever is driving, we can't see, but someone throws a suitcase out of the car door, followed by a weird wolf-mask.

She gathers the objects from the gravel and, helpless, starts chasing the car, waving to wait for her. But the car door violently closes and leaves with a squeal.

She is standing up, in a wide shot, alone in this flat infinite space. Then she looks at the suitcase, sits on it, grabs the strange mask from the floor and looks at it. She's about to cry.

VOICE OVER (FEMALE) MIXED

Stop! Cut! You are tired today. We worked this too much.
Take a day off, and let's meet here tomorrow at 7am.

We see a Gelato truck arriving behind her.

We can hear the music from the truck's speakers: Josephine Baker. Bye Bye Blackbird, 1927. She turns around, and sees:

JOE, a man dressed in a vintage cupcake chef uniform, around 60 years old, comes out of the tiny truck. He seems quite happy and satisfied. Initially he doesn't acknowledge her. He opens the window of the truck, we can read on a handmade sign JOE'S DREAM CUPCAKE.

He places his signs with the cupcake's truck name, adjusts the signs with the prices. He polishes the counter carefully, the colors are pastel, reminiscent of the fifties. He places an advertising sign right in front of the window of the truck and polishes it. He performs all these actions like dance steps. His grace and agility are unpredictable for a man of his age and size.

The place is totally empty, there are only these two figures, far away from each other, distant. Joe's speaker's music still playing.

Joe sees her.

JOE

Good morning Miss? Can I interest
you in a delicious gelato alla
crema?

The girl doesn't answer. She seems lost in her thoughts.

JOE

Excuse me Miss, would you like to
try a delicious hand made gelato
alla crema today?

Tanesha turns around, bothered. Blows her nose.

TANESHA

...Are you talking to me?

JOE

It's free, it's on the house!

Tanesha looks at him as if he's from Mars, suspiciously:

TAN

No, Thank you.

JOE

It's very very good, you know. It's the best Gelato you
could ever find in the Southwest. How lucky you are!

TAN

Thank you, but...

JOE

You know what people say about my gelato? That when you try one once, you can't do without! See the sign?

He shows her his rudimentary advertising with a lady saying: "My dream is Joe's gelato!". Then he picks one cup and begins serving a gelato, looking at her, persuasive.

JOE

Here, you can try just a little bit!

TANESHA

Listen, I can't deal with this right now.

He turns serious, looks at her, almost hurt, looks down. Then he raises his shoulders, and starts eating his own gelato.

JOE

...Because if you want to make the greatest tasting gelato, first you have to select the ingredients very carefully. One cup of good fresh milk, 2 large fresh eggs, and a lot of patience of course to work the cream into the right consistency...

The girl starts showing some signs of distress. Joe realizes it.

JOE

Where are you heading today young Lady?

TANESHA

Listen, I'd like to be left alone.

JOE

Oh! Don't be so serious! A good gelato artist is always at his client's service!

TANESHA (looking away)

Ok, now I'm your client.

She takes a beat and then looks at him with an interrogative look.

TANESHA

And why are you expecting to find clients in the middle of the desert? There's nothing here.

JOE

Well, it's all about waiting. Patience is important as much as perseverance. (pause) What's important is not the color of the shape, but the taste that leaves in your mouth. This is the first rule of a proper confectioner, always be concentrated on the taste in your mouth, my father always told me... You know, my poor father was from Palermo, in Sicily, he was a gelataio there and... he was an award winner for this Crema flavour...

TAN

Please, stop. Please!

Wind starts blowing. The girl sits on the suitcase, she is stressed. In the sky we see birds crossing.

JOE

I don't mean to disturb you. But I want you to know that here, it's hard. If you were looking for a ride here...

TAN

Don't you get tired of this?

JOE

Not tired, but you see, here no one passes. No cars. No one.

TAN

Listen, a while ago you told me that for you it doesn't make any difference, it's just about waiting. Well, here I am, waiting too. (pause) Please, leave me alone.

Right at that moment, a car hurtles without stopping in the nearby highway.

JOE

See? There goes a car now.

TAN

I'm not blind!

JOE
But it didn't stop.

TAN
There goes a client now.

JOE
And I can guarantee you that if they did stop, they surely
would have had a cupcake.

TAN
(looking at the initial car's direction)
Anyhow, it didn't stop.

JOE
Well, it's true, It didn't stop. You're right.

More silence. The sky turns cloudy. The girl, like the sky,
falls back into her darkness. She is about to cry.
He is restless, looks at her, comes in and out of the truck
a few times, he doesn't know whether or not to console her.
He grabs a stool from the truck and sits right next to her.

JOE
(maternal)
Please, don't be sad. What is it? You need to talk. Get it
all out. See? I am here. I'm not going anywhere. Just get
it all out.

The girl is crying again. Without making eye-contact with
him, she covers her eyes with her hand. Tears.

JOE
I'm gonna stop talking. See?
I'm gonna sit here, silent. I'm not gonna say a word. But
don't you cry. Talk to me.

For the first time Tanesha looks at him, breathes from her
nose, stops crying. She almost raises a smile to him. Eye
contact, wipe her tears.

She starts laughing now, the insistence of Joe is becoming
comedic, she can't hide laughing.

TAN
Would you please shut up for just a minute?
Is it possible?

Joe mimes the sign of a zip on his mouth, then he respond to her, smiling.

TAN
Why should I tell you my own business?

Joe shrugs.

JOE
Well, then tell me someone else's business. Someone else's story.

TAN
(wearing the mask)
You are curious, you know that?
You are crazy.

Tanesha looks back at the empty sky. Birds crossing frame. For the first time she leaves her suitcase-chair behind. She takes the mask with her, and starts wearing it, while she gets closer to him. With an intense and seductive look, she gets close to his nose and staring into his eyes:

TAN
(looks back at the first car's point of exit)
I will tell you the story of a young prince, tortured by his own doubts...

FADE OUT
FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (B/W)

We can see a dark bedroom with Tanesha in a bed. The shy moonbeam light from a window. Tanesha turns around in the bed, looking for someone at the other side. Nothing. She comes out of the bed, and sitting on it, she starts crying.

She looks nostalgically out of the window.

She stands up, walks barefoot towards the mirror on her dresser, there's a furry mask on it. Still crying, she looks at herself in the mirror and whispers:

TANESHA WITH WOLF MASK

And they all realized, that if they wanted to, they could be a mechanism able to produce pure energy, multiply it, fix it in the space. That discovery was to them, only comparable to the discovery of fire or of poetry, between the massive columns of ancient temples.

Tanesa wears the mask and looking in the mirror:

TANESHA

Who are you now?

TANESHA WWM

Now, I am Alone. An actor who rehearses the part, fights, struggles, sweats to make it work.

TANESHA

And all this hard work, for what?

TANESHA WWM

To be a part of the show, to leave an everlasting sign...
...Immortality.

DIRECTOR OFF SCREEN

Cut!

(This is revealed from the back, in silhouette, he raises his arm against the lit set)

INTERIOR SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

The scene turns in color, an assistant walks on the set with a robe, a gaffer is measuring with a light meter, etc. A dolly reveals a crew, working on the floor of a soundstage around the fake bedroom. The director, who we can not see, in silhouette and blocked by others, walks into the set, and gets closer to Tanesha, who abandoned her head on the vanity exhausted.

Back at the camera POV we hear from the microphone left on, the comments of workers and technicians:

TECH 1

Eighteen takes in two days, after he kicked her out yesterday, now she's out for sure.

TECH 2

Too bad, I thought she was hot.

TECH 1

He's gonna call it a day, I think.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE SET - NIGHT

Back on the set, by the vanity, we see Tanesha leaning on the vanity with her head in her arms, stressed out and about to cry for real. Her image is reflected in the mirror. On her shoulder, one man's hand. She rises her look, and sees in the mirror: Joe, the director.

TAN

I just can't do it... I can't feel it.

DIRECTOR

We worked at this scene forever Tanesha. You are tired. Listen to what I hear. See what I'm seeing. You are chasing a dream.

Tanesha doesn't respond, drying her tears. She turns at Joe, and smiles. The music cue starts, she still holds her mask in her hands.

Cut to:

Beach footage, Tanesha walks down the beach, singing with a gelato in her hand.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

EXT. RURAL FIELD - DAY

Close up of Joe's eyes, he is ecstatic and his eyes are shining. Tanesha is now wearing the wolf mask.

JOE

This story is beautiful... I...

TAN

Not everybody liked it.

JOE
How... How can you be so good at telling a story!

TAN
In a way, that's my job.

JOE
Your job?

TAN
(taking off the mask and looking at it)
My job.

TAN
(puts the mask away)
But at the moment I am someone who doesn't have a story to
be. (Pause. Looks at Joe)
Talking with some weirdo from Palermo who thinks he's a
confectioner named Joe.

JOE
Listen, you are incredible. I got goosebumps over here!
(showing her his arm)
See? I got goosebumps.

TAN
(smiling)
You said you were gonna shut up.

He looks at her, ravished, smiling. She smiles.

JOE
Hey I want to take you somewhere. It's a surprise. You want
to come?

TAN
NO!

He shrugs, starts wrapping the truck. He turns on the
engine and takes off. She stops him and gets on the vehicle
moving.

TAN
Ok ok, let's go.

EXTERIOR ROADS - DAY

The Cushman travels on the road, They smile and sing the song.

EXTERIOR DESERT - DAY

They arrive on a deserted landscape, the dune, they come out of the Cushman, she looks around.

TAN

Give me that gelato, now.

JOE

Of course signorina... Un gelato per te.

TAN

Tell me a story now!

JOE

OK, I'll try.

When I was a kid...

FADE OUT:

EXTERIOR DESERT - DAY

TAN

What a story...

JOE

(turns smiley)

It's a story that tastes like Ice cream! How does it taste?

TAN

(She tries the gelato, likes it)

Sweet, Joe. Sweet.

JOE

Patience and perseverance.

(He looks at her)

Patience...

Tanesha looks around with a sense of liberation. She looks at the gelato in her hand, it is melting down. Smiles. She starts walking away.

She turns towards Joe, but he is gone. The truck is gone, with all the signs and Joe in it.

She walks through the dunes with her gelato singing, and the ocean is revealed. From the sound of her voice, the wind blowing and the ocean sound, we start hearing a few instruments coming in the song, gradually. A cello, a piano.

TANESHA

Pack up all my cares and go, here I go, singing low...

While she walks singing, she turns around, she sees:

EXTERIOR BEACH - DAY

A film crew is following her steps, in silence and concentration.

DIRECTOR

Cut! Wonderful!

Tanesha looks at them, smiles.

Fine

Appendix 3: Finished Script

Bye-Bye Blackbird

by Gaia Bonsignore

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (B/W)

We can see a dark bedroom with Tanesha (24) in a bed. The shy moonbeam light from a window. Tanesha turns around in the bed, looking for someone at the other side. Nothing. She comes out of the bed, and sitting on it, she seems sad.

She looks nostalgically out of the window.

EXT. RURAL FIELD - Early Morning

Abandoned house on the plain (only sparse vegetation). No one is around, just the plane and the sky with birds flying through it.

A car rushes in the country road.

A beautiful black girl, tall and stunning, TANESHA (23) comes out of the car quickly. She looks upset, unsettled, maybe she was crying a minute earlier.

Whoever is driving, we can't see, but someone throws a suitcase out of the car door.

She starts chasing the car, waving to wait for her. But the car door violently closes and leaves with a squeal.

She is standing up, in a wide shot, alone in this flat infinite space. She walks towards the house, realizes it's empty. She walks back towards the gravel road. Then she looks at the suitcase, sits on it. She's about to cry.

We see a Gelato truck arriving on the road.
She sees:

JOE, a man dressed in a vintage cupcake chef uniform, around 60 years old, comes out of the tiny truck. He seems

quite happy and satisfied. Initially he doesn't acknowledge her. We can read on a handmade sign JOE'S DREAM GELATO.

He places his signs with the gelato's truck name. The colors are pastel, reminiscent of the fifties. He places an advertising sign right in front of the window of the truck and polishes it. The place is totally empty, there are only these two figures, far away from each other, distant.

JOE

Good morning Miss? Can I interest
you in a delicious gelato alla
crema?

The girl doesn't answer. She seems lost in her thoughts.

JOE

Excuse me Miss, would you like to
try a delicious hand made gelato
alla crema today?

Tanesha turns around, bothered. Blows her nose.

JOE

It's free! It's on the house!

Tanesha looks at him as if he's from Mars, suspiciously.

JOE

It's the best Gelato in the Southwest.

JOE

You know what people say about my gelato? That when you try
one once, you can't do without! See the sign? I made it...
What do you say?

He shows her his rudimentary advertising with a lady
saying: "My dream is Joe's gelato!". Looking at her,
persuasive, he invites her to sit on the chair of his truck

JOE

Here, you can try just a little bit!

TANESHA

(walks towards the chair)
Listen, I can't deal with this right now.

He turns serious, looks at her, almost hurt, looks down.
Then he raises his shoulders.

JOE
...Because if you want to make the greatest tasting gelato,
first you have to select the ingredients very carefully.
One cup of good fresh milk, 2 large fresh eggs, and a lot
of patience - to work the cream into the right
consistency...

The girl starts showing some signs of distress. Joe
realizes it.

JOE
A good gelato artist is always at his client's service!

TANESHA (looking away)
Now I'm your client?

She takes a beat and then looks at him with an
interrogative look.

TANESHA
Why are you expecting to find clients in the middle of
nowhere?

Joe takes his jacket off and changes his hat.

JOE
Well, it's all about waiting. Patience is important as much
as perseverance. (pause) What's important is the taste that
it leaves in your mouth. This is the first rule of a proper
confectioner, always be concentrated on the taste and the
texture that it leaves in your mouth. At least that's what
my old man said... You know, he was from Palermo, in
Sicily, he was a gelataio there and... He won first prize
this very flavour...

TAN
Please, stop. Please!

Wind starts blowing. The girl sits, she is stressed.

JOE
55

I want you to know that here, it's hard.

TAN

Don't you get tired of this?

JOE

Tired? Me? Never... But you see, here no one passes. No one.

Right at that moment, a car hurtles without stopping in the nearby highway.

JOE

Ohh? There goes a car now! But it didn't stop. And I can guarantee you that if they did stop, they surely would have had a gelato.

More silence. The sky turns cloudy. The girl, like the sky, falls back into her darkness. She starts crying. He is restless, looks at her, he doesn't know whether or not to console her. He grabs a stool from the truck and sits right next to her.

JOE

(maternal)

Ma che fai? Piangi? Don't Cry. No, don't cry.
You need to talk. Get it all out. See? I am here. I'm not going anywhere. Just get it all out.

The girl is crying again. Without making eye-contact with him, she covers her eyes with her hand. Tears.

JOE

I'm gonna stop talking. See?
I'm gonna sit here, I'm not gonna say a word. But you need to talk.

For the first time Tanesha looks at him, breathes from her nose, stops crying. She almost raises a smile to him. Eye contact, wipe her tears.

TAN

Would you please shut up? Is it possible?

Joe mimes the sign of a zip on his mouth, then he respond

to her, smiling.

TAN

Why should I tell you my own business?

Joe shrugs.

JOE

Well, then tell me someone else's business. Someone else's story.

TAN

(wearing the mask)

You are curious, you know that?

You are crazy. Selling ice cream to no one, to ghosts.

She takes the mask from her bag, and starts wearing it, while she gets closer to him. With an intense look, she's staring into his eyes:

TAN

But I can tell you a story.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (B/W)

Tanesha looks nostalgically out of the window.

She stands up, walks barefoot towards the mirror on her dresser. Still crying, she looks at herself in the mirror and whispers:

TANESHA

Once - There was this mask, searching for her real face.
When the mask finally found her missing face, they both
knew their dream became eternal.

And they both realized, that if they wanted to, they could
be a mechanism able to produce pure energy, multiply it,
fix it in the space. That discovery was to them, only
comparable to the discovery of fire or of poetry, between

the massive columns of ancient temples.
EXT. RURAL FIELD - DAY

Close up of Joe's eyes, he is ecstatic and his eyes are shining. Tanesha is now wearing the wolf mask.

JOE
That... Was incredible...

TAN
Yes, but not everybody liked it.

JOE
How can you be so good at telling a story!

TAN
In a way, that's my job.

JOE
Your job?

TAN
(taking off the mask and looking at it)
My job.

TAN
(puts the mask away)
But at the moment I am someone who doesn't have a story to be. Talking with some weirdo from Palermo who thinks he's a confectioner, named Joe?

JOE
Listen, you are incredible. I got goosebumps over here!
(showing her his arm)

He looks at her, ravished, smiling. She smiles.

JOE
Hey I want to take you somewhere. It's a surprise. You want to come?

TAN
NO!
58

He shrugs, starts wrapping the truck. He turns on the engine and takes off. She stops him and gets on the vehicle moving.

TAN
Ok ok, let's go.

EXTERIOR ROADS - DAY
The Cushman travels on the road.

EXTERIOR DESERT - DAY
They arrive on a deserted landscape, the dune, they come out of the Cushman, she looks around.

TAN
I think I want that gelato, now.

JOE
Of course signorina... Un gelato per te.

TAN
I told you my story, now it's your turn.

JOE
Me? OK, I'll try.
When I was a kid...

FADE OUT:

INTERIOR WHITE - DAY

Montage of Joe as a young boy over *Bye Bye Blackbird* 1927 song. He puts Josephine Baker's record, hugs the record cover, starts singing. Then he starts dancing. Joe as a kid cuts a paper doll of Josephine, then loads a camera with super8 Film and starts recording his puppet show. Joe in the audience eats the gelato and smiles to the show. Joe smiles and closes the red curtain of the puppet theatre.

EXTERIOR DESERT - DAY
TAN
That was a great story...

JOE
(turns smiley)
It's a story that tastes kind of like Ice cream! A
proposito, how is the gelato?

TAN
(Smiles)
Sweet, Joe.

JOE
Patience and perseverance.
(He looks at her)
Patience...

Tanesha looks around with a sense of liberation. She looks at the gelato in her hand, it is melting down. Smiles. She starts walking away.

She turns towards Joe, but he is gone. The truck is gone, with all the signs and Joe in it.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (B/W)

TANESHA
Who are you now?

TANESHA WOLF MASK
Now, I am Alone. An actor who rehearses the part, fights, struggles, sweats to make it work.

And all this hard work, for what?

To be a part of the show, to leave an everlasting sign...
(...Immortality).

DIRECTOR OFF SCREEN
Cut!
(This is revealed from the back, he raises his arm against the lit set)

INTERIOR SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

The scene turns in color, an assistant walks on the set with a robe, a gaffer is measuring with a light meter, etc. A dolly reveals a crew, working on the floor of a soundstage around the fake bedroom. The director, who we can not see, walks into the set, and gets closer to Tanesha, who abandoned her head on the vanity exhausted. Back at the camera POV we see the comments of workers and technicians:

TECH 1

57 takes in two days, she's out of here after this, for sure buddy. He's gonna call it a day.

TECH 2

She's hot.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE SET - NIGHT

Back on the set, by the vanity, we see Tanesha leaning on the vanity with her head in her arms, stressed out and about to cry for real. Her image is reflected in the mirror. On her shoulder, one man's hand. She rises her look, and sees in the mirror: Joe, the director.

DIRECTOR

Immortality, Tanesha. Immortality.

Tanesha turns at Joe, gives him a bad look, stands up and starts walking towards the exit.

TANESHA

Immortality? IMMORTALITY! But I can't feel it.

DIRECTOR

(nuts)

You don't feel it...

(yells)

You don't have to feel it! I have to feel it! You feel what I feel!

TANESHA

I'm sorry. Call me a cab.

DIRECTOR
(sarcastic and laughing loud)
She is sorry! She's sorry to waste everybody's time!

Tanesha storms away from the studio on the verge of crying.
Joe follows her.

DIRECTOR
(quiet)
Tanesha. You have a chance to say something that will live
forever.

TANESHA
Forever? Joe, we are mortal.

DIRECTOR
Sure we are. It's our stories that never die. All you have
to do is believe them.

Tanesha smiles. The music cue starts, they walk back in the
studio disappearing behind the door.

CUT TO:

EXTERIOR BEACH - DAY

She walks through the dunes with her gelato singing, and
the ocean is revealed. The sound of her voice, mixes with
the wind blowing and the ocean sound.

TANESHA
Pack up all my cares and go, here I go, singing low...

While she walks singing, she turns around, she sees:

EXTERIOR BEACH - DAY
A film crew is following her steps, in silence and
concentration.

Tanesha looks at them, smiles.

Credits

Appendix 4: Visual References



Figure 1: Gelato eaters in the 40' and 50' - Inspiration for Joe's sign.

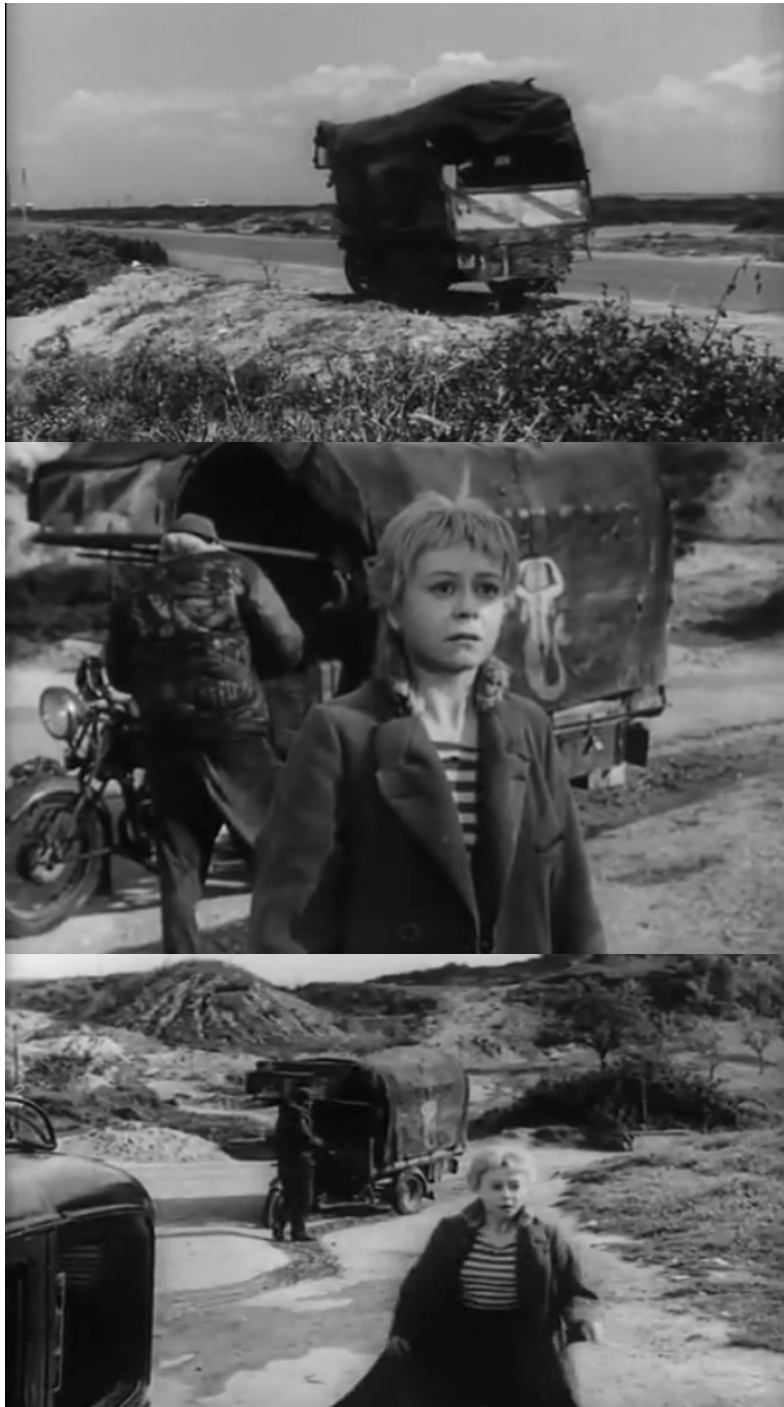


Figure 2: First inspiration for the Cushman: *La Strada*, F.Fellini, 1954



Figure 3: *Bagdad Café* and *Bye-Bye Blackbird* - Car sequences.



Figure 4: Anthony Quinn in *La Strada* - Solitary ending/Main character at the beach.



Figure 5: *Paris Texas, Baghdad Café and Bye-Bye Blackbird* - Landscape study



Figure 6: *Baghdad Café* and *Bye-Bye Blackbird* – Relationship Character/Environment



Figure 7: *Living in Oblivion* and *Bye-Bye Blackbird* – Director's Role study



Figure 8: Meta-Cinema - *Living in Oblivion*, *The State of Things*, *BBBB*.



Figure 9: *Smashing Pumpkins* music Video, *Today* – Vehicle in Landscape

Appendix 5: Production Design

Frame for Cushman
Bye Bye Blackbird
5 Nov 2012
David Yépez Conley

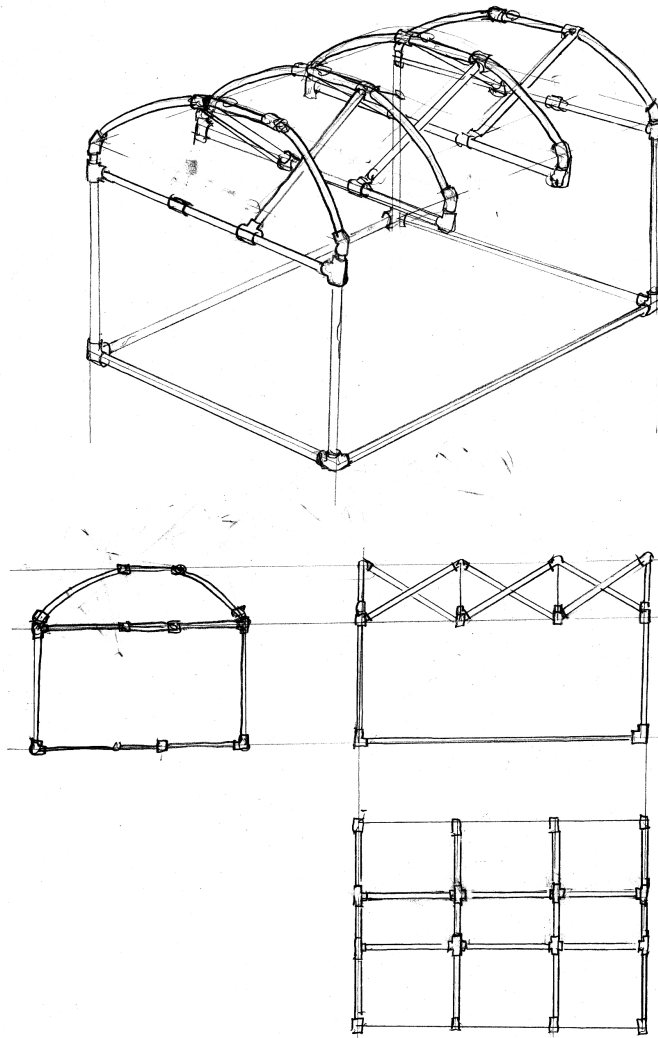


Figure 10: Cushman Frame Project



Figure 11: First Project - Cushman.

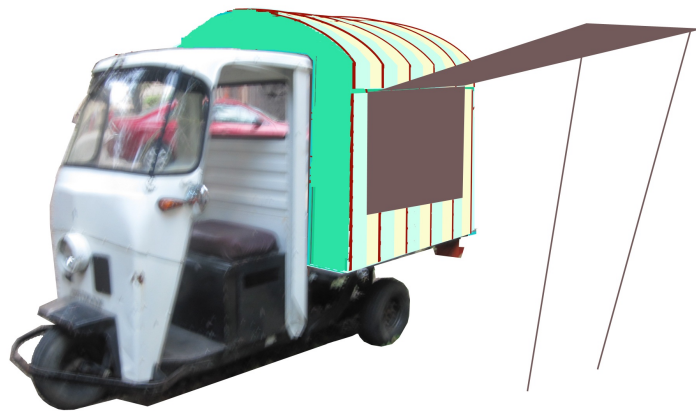


Figure 12: Color/Structure Project – Cushman



Figure 13: Cushman, Before and After



Wardrobe/Color Concept Work
Bye Bye Blackbird
Scheme A
David Yépez Conley, Production Designer
27 October 2012

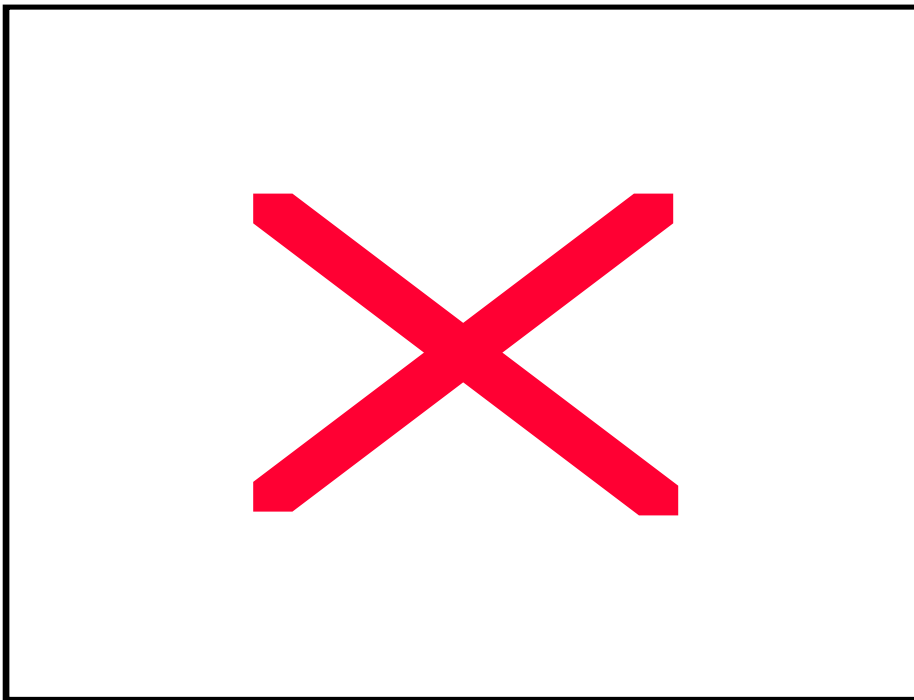
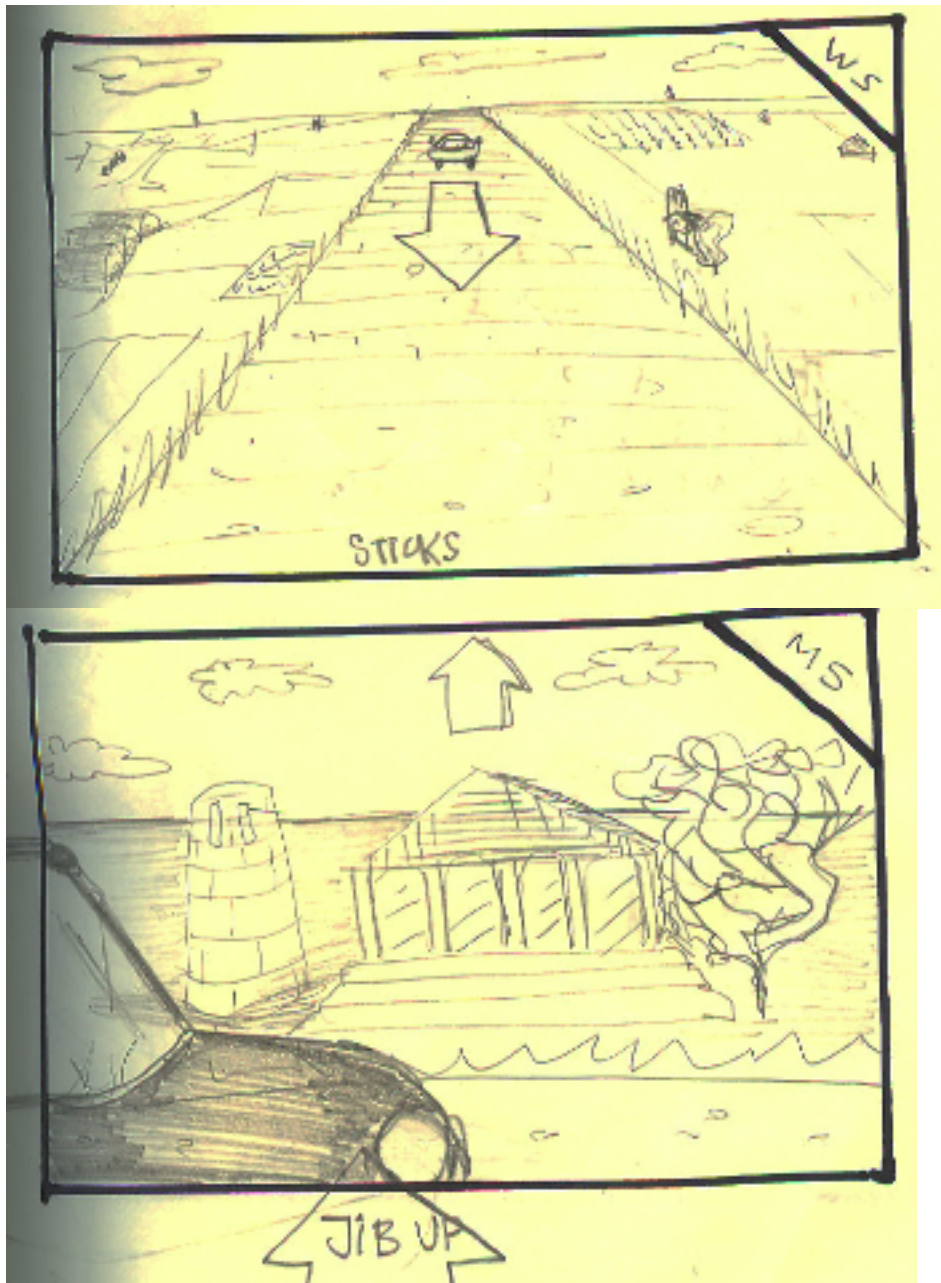
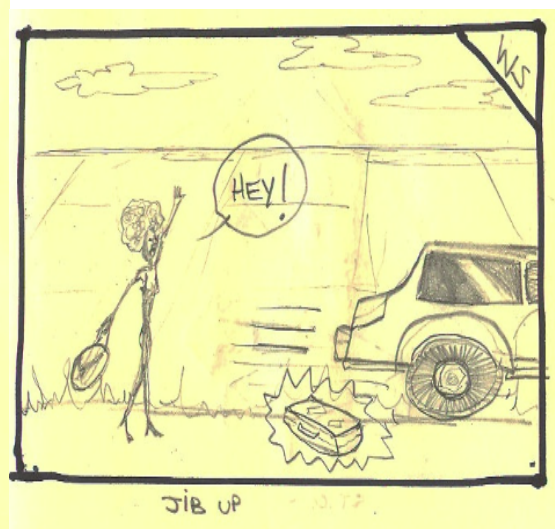
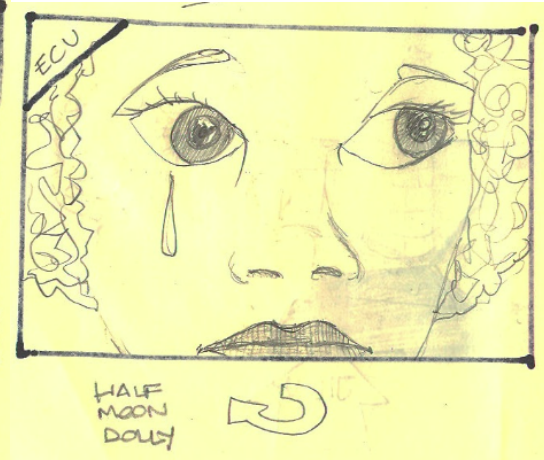
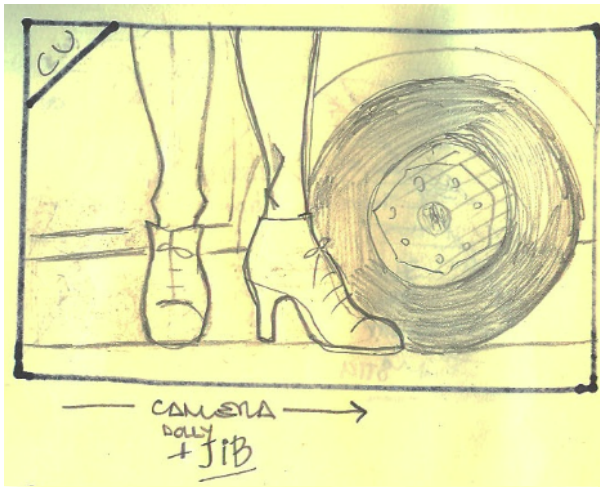
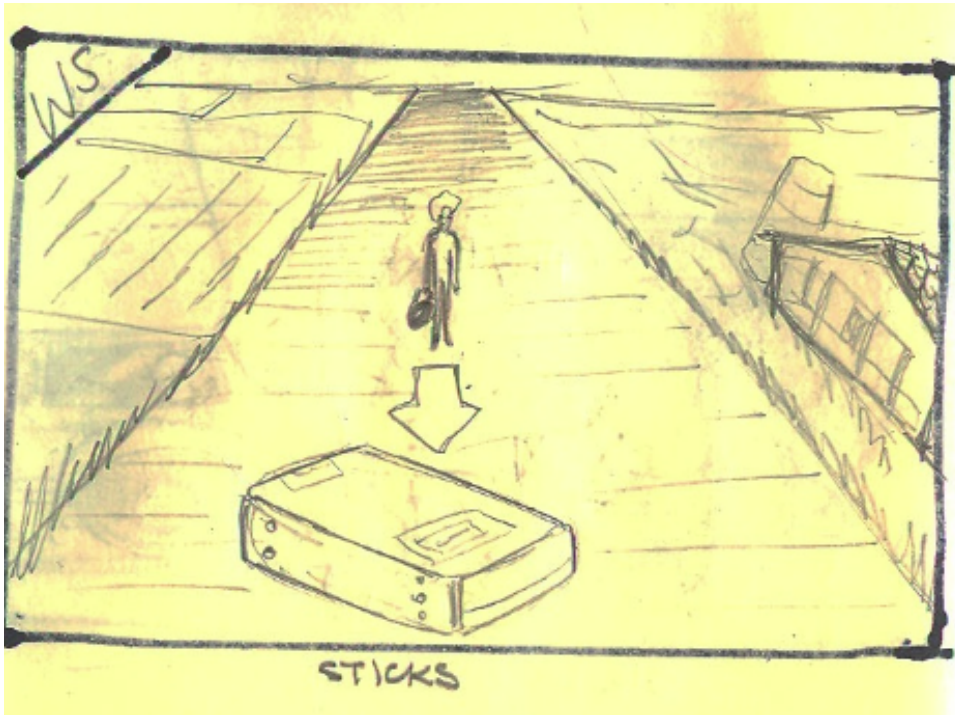


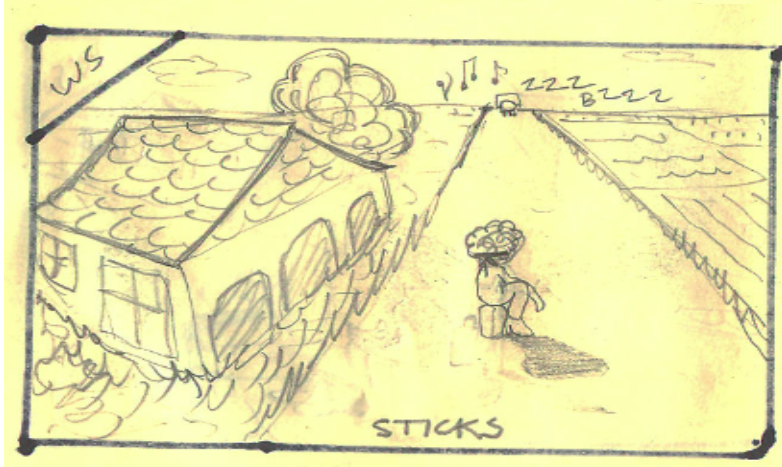
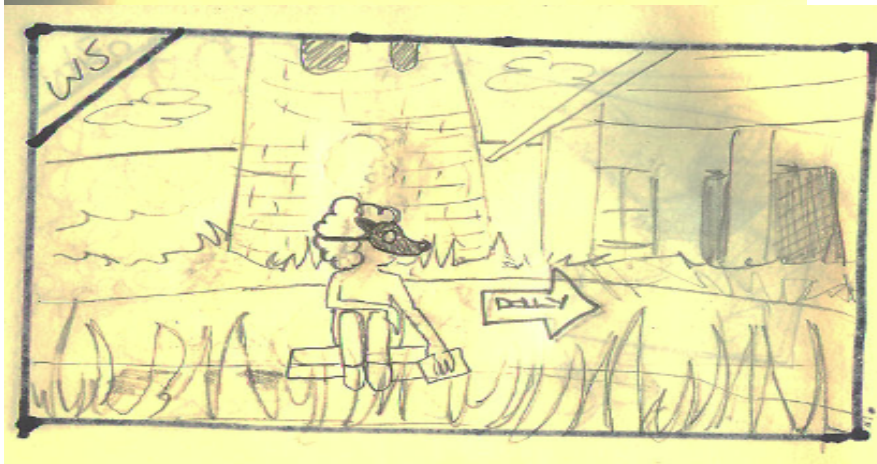
Figure 14: Wardrobe/Color - Early Concept Work

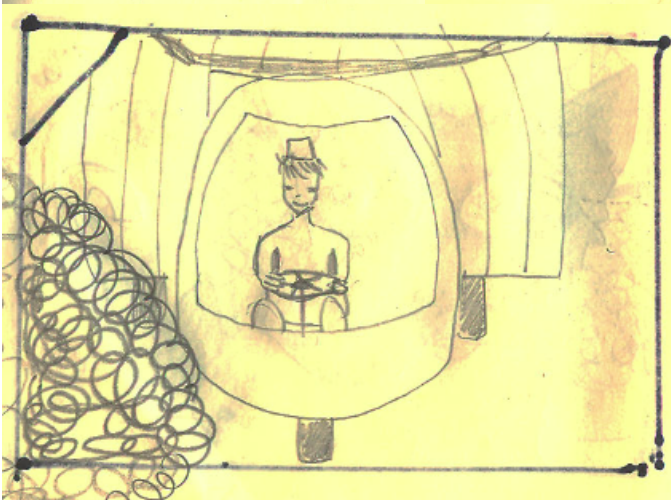
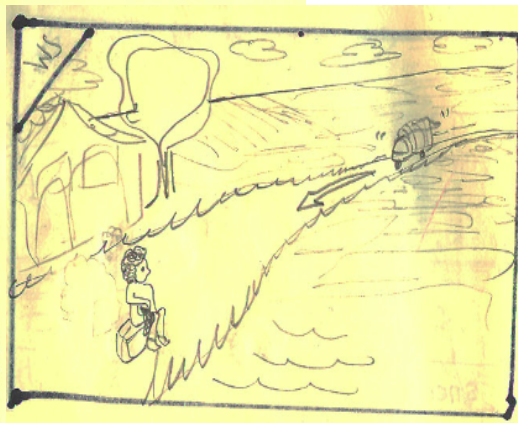
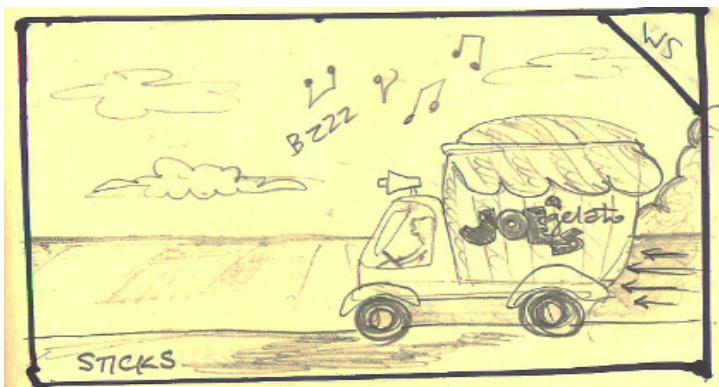
Appendix 6: Storyboards

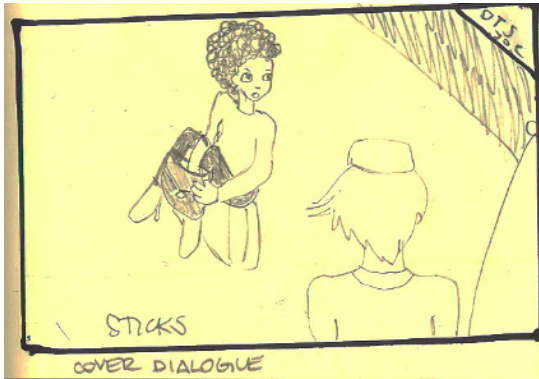












Bye bye Blackbird - THE FILM in THE FILM



2.1
WS

DOLLY PUSH IN



2.3
MCU

MONOLOGUE
COMPOSITING: NO MASK

DOLLY +
STICKS

DOLLY MOVE AROUND
SET WALL
REVEALS: PROFILE +
MIRROR CU



2.2
WS → CU

DOLLY
PUSH IN





Figure 15: Tivoli, TX and the beach sets.

References

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Vita

Gaia came to the USA from Italy and she has been making movies since 2002. In her M.F.A. at the University of Texas at Austin she wrote, directed and edited the narrative and documentaries short films *The Hallway* (2006), *Live your Cinema! The Austin Media Arts* (2009), *Valentina* (2012), *Beautiful Radiant Things* (2011), *Love in Five Acts* (2012) and *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (2013).

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